

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-17

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00

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O R 212005 Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4625

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 2286

LIMA FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY KUBISCH

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV HO

SUBJ: RUMORS OF MILITARY DISAFFECTION IN HONDURAS

REF: SAN SALVADOR 2350

SUMMARY. EMBASSY DISCOUNTS RUMORS THAT DISSIDENT ELEMENTS OF HONDURAN ARMED FORCES ARE PLANNING TO OVERTHROW LOPEZ. WE CONSIDER THAT ZUNIGA AND NATIONALIST PARTY OUTS ARE MAINLY BEHIND SPREADING THESE STORIES INTO OTHER CA COUNTRIES. REALITY SEEMS TO BE THAT ARMED FORCES ARE STRONG IN SUPPORT OF GENERAL AND PRESENT GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE KNOWN TO EMBASSY OF ANY SIGNIFICANT DISAFFECTION WITHIN HONDURAN ARMED FORCES DIRECTED EITHER AGAINST GENERAL LOPEZ AS CHIEF OF STATE AND CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OR AGAINST CIVILIAN CABINET. THERE
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ARE SOME STORIES CIRCULATING IN TEGUCIGALPA OF IMMINENT SALVADORAN ARMED ACTION AGAINST HONDURAS, BUT THESE HAVE NOT REPEAT NOT BEEN CONNECTED TO SALVADORAN STIMULATION OF ANTI- LOPEZ SENTIMENTS AMONG HONDURAN OFFICER CORPS (AS HONDURANS KNOW, GOES WOULD BE LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN THIS OF ANY CENTRAL AMERICAN FACTORS).

2. RUMORS OF DISSIDENCE IN ARMED FORCES DIRECTED AGAINST GENERAL LOPEZ HAVE BEEN ASSIDUOUSLY SPREAD BY ZUNIGA AND NATIONALIST PARTY OUTS. STORIES PEAKED IN APRIL WHEN MANY HONDURANS PROFESSED TO KNOW THAT DATE FOR COUNTER- COUP WAS TO BE IN SEMANA SANTA. THIS WAS OF COURSE NOTHING BUT COMPLETELY UNFOUNDED GOSSIP. THESE FICTIONS ALMOST COMPLETELY DIED OUT IN MAY, AND ARE STILL RETAILED LOCALLY ONLY BY CLOSEST MEMBERS OF ZUNIGA' S ENTOURAGE (AND BY ZUNIGA HIMSELF IN LATE MAY).

3. WE NOW HAVE EVIDENCE THAT ZUNIGA PARTISANS ARE STILL SPREADING STORY CURRENTLY IN OTHER CA CAPITALS, MOST RECENT EXAMPLE BEING GOH AMBASSADOR TO NICARAGUA MOISES LOPEZ MALDONADO. (LOPEZ IS FANATICAL NATIONALIST PARTY MEMBER WHO WAS PARTY' S LEADING IAOPAGANDIST IN 1960 S AND IN 1971 ELECTION.) OTHER CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH THESE REPORTS WERE BEING RETAILED, WE THINK INNOCENTLY, WERE CENTRAL AMERICAN BANK. BANK ASSOCIATION WITH RUMORS, HOWEVER, WAS, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, LIMITED TO MARCH/ EARLY APRIL, AND IN MAY THESE SOURCES PROFESSED TO US THAT STORY WAS A FABRICATION.

4. OBVIOUS AIM OF THIS CAMPAIGN IS TO CREATE JUMPINESS AT HOME AND TO DISCREDIT NEW GOVERNMENT REGIONALLY. IT HAS LARGELY FAILED IN FIRST GOAL. WE CAN IMAGINE THAT THESE GOALS MAY APPEAL TO CERTAIN CIRCLES IN SALVADOR, BUT DO NOT KNOW WHETHER GOES TAKES RUMORS SERIOUSLY OR WHETHER IT IS ONLY PRETENDING TO TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY WITH CYNICAL INTENTIONS.

5. PARTICULAR RUMORS HAVE CONSISTED OF ALLEGATIONS, FOR WHICH WE CAN FIND NO FOUNDATION, THAT AIR FORCE
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COMMANDER SOTO CANO IS DISAFFECTED WITH GENERAL LOPEZ AND IS PLANNING WITH OTHER OFFICERS TO REPLACE HIM WITH " TRIUMVIRATE" AND POSSIBLY NEW FIGUREHEAD PRESIDENT. MINISTER OF INTERIOR COL JUAN ALBERTO MELGAR IS FREQUENTLY MENTIONED (EVEN BY ZUNIGA PERSONALLY) AS OTHER MEMBER OF TRIUMVIRATE. IMPLICATIONS ARE THAT THIS GROUP WILL RECALL ZUNIGA TO GOVERNMENT, AND WE

HAVE EVEN BEEN " CONFIDENTIALLY" TOLD WHO " NEW PRESIDENT" WILL BE. AMONG SEVERAL IRONIES IN THIS RUMOR IS FACT THAT COL MELGAR IS ZUNIGA' S STRONGEST PERSONAL ENEMY IN ARMED FORCES.

6. THE FACTS SEEM TO BE QUITE THE CONTRARY. ON MAY 26 SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL MET AND BY UNANIMOUS VOTE STRONGLY ENDORSED GENERAL LOPEZ AS CHIEF OF STATE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT (TEGUCIGALPA 1992). COUNCIL INCLUDES ALL REPEAT ALL OFFICERS WITH MAJOR COMMANDS IN COUNTRY. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY ELABORATE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS FOR THIRD BATTALION IN SAN PEDRO SULA ON JUNE 14, WHEN SECOND ZONE (SAN PEDRO SULA) COMMANDER MIGUEL ANGEL GARCIA FULSOMELY PRAISED GENERAL LOPEZ IN HIGHLY POLITICAL SPEECH AGAIN ENDORSING PRESENT GOVERNMENT. THIS CEREMONY AGAIN WAS ATTENDED BY OFFICERS WITH MAJOR COMMANDS (AND BY LARGE PORTION OF SAN PEDRO CIVILIAN ELITE). EVENT CONSTITUTED IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY OF OFFICER CORPS UNITY (AS WELL AS STRONG ACCEPT- ANCE OF GENERAL BY CIVILIAN POPULATION, WHICH WAS EARLIER SHOWN IN SAN PEDRO SULA ON MAY DAY TURNOUT WHICH GENERAL ADDRESSED).

7. CONFIDENCE AND RELAXATION CHARACTERIZING GENERAL' S POSITION ARE INDICATED BY CIRCUMSTANCE THAT CHIEF OF STAFF COL HERNANDEZ LEFT COUNTRY YESTERDAY FOR 25-30 DAY WORLD TOUR, AND THAT GENERAL IS PLANNING TO GO TO MIAMI FOR MEDICAL CHECKUP SOMETIME ABOUT JUNE 26-30. HERNANDEZ IS KEY FIGURE FOR GENERAL LOPEZ' DIRECT ADMINISTRATION OF ARMED FORCES (HIS FUNCTION HAS BEEN DELEGATED TO LT COL CESAR ELVIR, A LOPEZ LOYALIST AND ANTI- ZUNIGUIST).

8. ANOTHER ELEMENT IS RUMOR ATMOSPHERE IS LOCAL STORY
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THAT GOES IS NOW PLANNING SOME " PUNITIVE MILITARY ACTION" AGAINST HONDURAS. WE FIRST HEARD REPORT IN MID- MAY FROM FONMIN ASESOR VIRGILIO GALVEZ AND FROM NICARAGUAN EMBASSY IN TEGUCIGALPA. LATTER STATED WAR WOULD START WITHIN DAYS AND URGED US TO LAY UP FOOD STOCKS. CRONISTA AND VICTOR CACERES LARA (EX- VICE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS FOR NATIONALIST PARTY) ON JUNE 21 CARRIED EDITORIAL AND COLUMN TO SIMILAR EFFECT. CRONISTA ALSO JUNE 21 REPEATED A " NEWS" STORY IT CARRIED LAST WEEK THAT SALVADOR HAD RECENTLY RECEIVED "15 COMBAT AIRCRAFT AND ENORMOUS SHIPMENT OF WEAPONS OF ALL CALIBERS." INFORMED HONDURANS ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT THIS, BUT STORY SEEMS TO BE GAINING A SUBTERRANEAN CIRCULA- TION. (NATURALLY EMBASSY RIDICULES STORY WHEN WE HEAR IT.)

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9. WE THINK THIS RUMOR ORIGINATED IN INTEMPERANCE OF JUARATEGUI, SALVADORAN DELEGATE TO IDB MEETING IN JAMAICA IN EARLY MAY, WHEN HE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT SALVADORAN GENERAL STAFF WAS PREPARING TO TEACH HONDURANS A LESSON. AS EMBASSY SALVADOR HAS REPORTED, THIS EXCURSION BY JUARATEGUI WAS NOTHING MORE THAN ECCENTRIC DRUNKENNESS.

10. ALTHOUGH STORY DID NOT START WITH ZUNIGA, HE MAY HAVE DECIDED TO SPREAD IT, AS EVIDENCED BY ARTICLE OF HIS LONG- TIME ASSOCIATE, CACERES LARA.

11. AGAIN, WE HAVE FOUND NO EVIDENCE THAT HONDURAN MILITARY ARE MUCH CONCERNED ABOUT ANY POSSIBILITY OF SALVADORAN ATTACK. COL. HERNANDEZ INFORMED AMBASSADOR SANCHEZ ON JUNE 19 THAT HE IS CONTINUING TO TALK TO SALVADORAN C/ S IN AMICABLE MANNER ONCE A WEEK. AND OF COURSE HERNANDEZ' OWN DEPARTURE IS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF

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LACK OF CONCERN.

12. INCIDENTALLY, SOURCE IN SPANISH EMBASSY ON JUNE 21 INFORMED US THAT FIRE FIGHT OCCURRED JUNE 19 ON SALVADORAN BORDER, WITH SEVERAL KILLED. WE ARE TRYING TO CONFIRM. SUCH AN INCIDENT WOULD PLAY INTO HANDS OF RUMOR MONGERS.

13. WE HAVE GONE TO SOME LENGTH TO DELINEATE ANATOMY OF THESE RUMORS, WHICH REVERBERATE FROM ONE CORNER TO ANOTHER IN SMALL CENTRAL AMERICAN AREA. PROPAGANDA OF THIS NATURE OFTEN ACQUIRES LIFE AND CREDIBILITY OF ITS OWN DUE TO REGIONAL LOVE OF GOSSIP AND INGENUITY IN EMBROIDERING ON IT. IT IS SAD COMMENTARY ON REGIONAL SOBRIETY THAT GOVERNMENTS THEMSELVES LEND REALITY TO RUMORS BY ACTING ON THEM.

14. EMBASSY HOPES THAT OTHER US MISSIONS IN CA WILL DRAW FREELY ON FOREGOING IN APPROPRIATE DISCUSSIONS WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS. IN REALITY, LOCAL SCENE IS STABLE, GOVERNMENT IS INCREASING ITS ALREADY WIDE POPULAR SUPPORT, AND ARMED FORCES SEEM CALM AND DEDICATED TO SUCH INTERNAL MILITARY PREOCCUPATIONS AS NEW RETIREMENT LAW, UPGRADING OF EQUIPMENT AND CONTINUED OFFICER AND TROOP PROFESSIONALIZATION. LOPEZ, ARMED FORCES AND GOVERNMENT DO NOT TAKE POLITICAL PARTY RESENTMENTS AND PROPAGANDA SERIOUSLY; AND, AS MINISTER OF FINANCE ACOSTA ON JUNE 20 POINTED OUT TO AMBASSADOR SANCHEZ, GOH HAS ACHIEVED CONSIDERABLE SOCIAL PEACE WITHOUT IN ANY WAY RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF MEDIA, TAKING ANY POLITICAL PRISONERS, OR EXILING DISSIDENTS.

15. PLEASANT TREAT NICARAGUAN EMBASSY REPORT (PARA 8) AS NOFORN. WE CHOSE TO DISREGARD IT.
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